

The Class: living and learning in the digital age

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*Sonia Livingstone and Julian Sefton-Green spent one year with a class of 13 year olds – at school, at home, with their friends, and online. Their book about this research project, **The Class: living and learning in the digital age**, will come out in early May and this is the first in a series of posts in which Sonia shares highlights from the book. Sonia is Professor of Social Psychology at LSE's **Department of Media and Communications** and has more than 25 years of experience in media research with a particular focus on children and young people. She is the lead investigator of the **Parenting for a Digital Future** research project. [Header image credit: V. Donoso, used with permission]*

What goes on at school, in today's classroom or in the lunch break? What do kids get up to on the way home from school? Is everyone staring at a screen all day, whether at the front of the class or under the desk? For parents, children's experiences at school are often unknown, hidden behind the stock answer "nothing much", when asked: "what happened at school today?"

In my contributions to this blog, I have often drawn on insights, findings and arguments of **The Class**, a recent research project conducted together with **Julian Sefton-Green** in which we spent a year with a class of 13 year olds – at school, at home, with their friends, and online. We were curious to learn answers to questions such as:

- Do today's youth have more **opportunities** than their parents?
- As they build their own social and digital networks, does that offer **new routes** to learning and friendship?
- How do they navigate opportunities for **formal and informal learning** in a digitally connected but fiercely competitive, highly individualized world?
- What is expected of parents, and what do parents actually do, when bringing up their young teens in the **digital age**?



On 3rd May 2016 our new book will be published by New York University Press, accompanied by a series of blog posts from me and Julian with highlights from the book.

The official description of the book gives a good idea of its main approach and concerns.

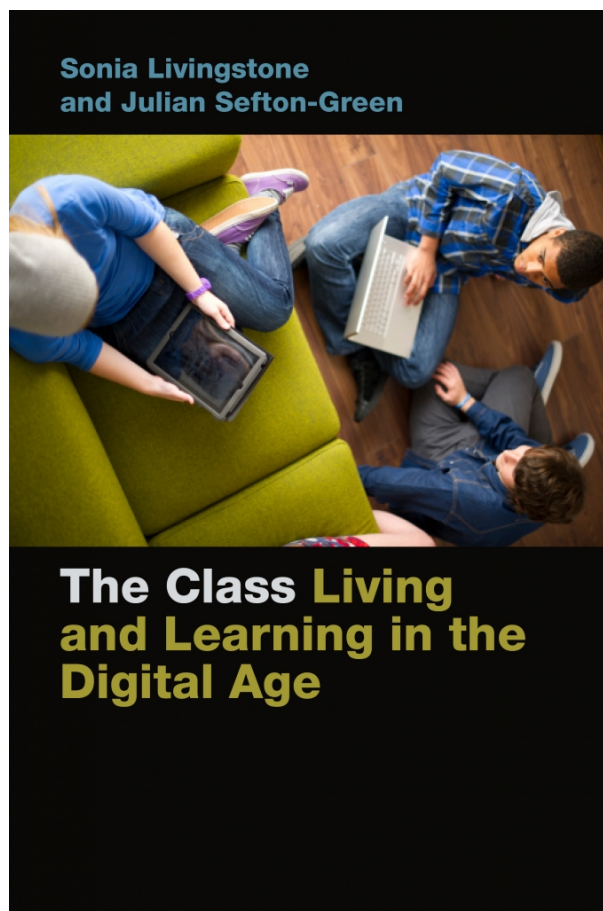
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Based upon fieldwork at an ordinary London school, The Class examines young people's experiences of growing up and learning in a digital world. In this original and engaging study, Livingstone and Sefton-Green explore youth values, teenagers' perspectives on their futures, and their tactics for facing the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. The authors follow the students as they move across their different social worlds—in school, at home, and with their friends, engaging in a range of activities from video games to drama clubs and music lessons.

By portraying the texture of the students' everyday lives, The Class seeks to understand how the structures of social class and cultural capital shape the development of personal interests, relationships and autonomy.

Providing insights into how young people's social, digital, and learning networks enable or disempower them, Livingstone and Sefton-Green reveal that the experience of disconnections and blocked pathways is often more common than that of connections and new opportunities.



The book reflects several years of fieldwork, analysis and writing, all part of our participation in the Connected Learning Research Network, funded by the MacArthur Foundation's **Digital Media and Learning** initiative. Recognising that we live in a **thoroughly mediated society**, this network is examining how children and young people already – and could in the future – connect **their formal and informal learning experiences** in school, home, with peers and in interest-driven activities.

Our answers to three questions above are presented in ten chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion:

- Introduction: An Invitation to Meet the Class
- 1 Living and Learning in the Digital Age
- 2 A Year of Fieldwork
- 3 Networks and Social Worlds
- 4 Identities and Relationships
- 5 Life at School: From Routines to Civility



- 6 Learning at School: Measuring and “Leveling” the Self

- 7 Life at Home Together and Apart

- 8 Making Space for Learning in the Home

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- 10 Life Trajectories, Social Mobility, and Cultural Capital

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Each chapter is grounded in original empirical research and each seeks to put children and young people’s experiences and voices to the fore. We’ve already received some great responses to the book:

In a richly textured account, *The Class* unpacks many of the grand claims made in public discourse about the perceived impact—positive and negative—of new media technologies on young people’s lives and future prospects. Intellectually engaging, lucidly written, and emotionally engrossing, *The Class* is required reading for policy makers, parents, and teachers alike.

— Kirsten Drotner, co-editor of *Informal Learning and Digital Media*

One of the richest investigations to date of young people across the major sites of their lives—school, family, and among their peers—*The Class* will be a distinctive contribution to media and youth studies. Displaying an impressive breadth of knowledge, the authors showcase lively ethnographic vignettes to draw significant, convincing, and exciting insights.

— Dorothy Holland, co-author of *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*

An exemplary ethnography whose holistic engagement with children at home as well as at school allow for judicious appraisals of what actually matters, motivates, and has consequences for their lives. By fully respecting the children’s attempts to control the impact of digital technologies, negotiate their relationships and internalise but tame institutional pressures, this book gives us precisely the kind of empathetic sense of the child that we need to retain as adults.

— Daniel Miller, author of *Social Media in an English Village*

Our book is the second in a new series called **Connected Youth and Digital Futures** which examines “changes at the intersection of civil and political reform, transformations in employment and education, and the growing presence of digital technologies in all aspects of social, cultural and political life.” (The first book is by Henry Jenkins and colleagues and called **By any media necessary: the new youth activism**). What’s really great is that, although we’d love you to buy *The Class*, you’ll also be able to read the books in the series online for free, as soon as they are published.

You can already read one of our key case studies – about how the class was encouraged by the school to use social and digital networks to support their learning, and how they resisted this effort – [here](#). In the coming weeks and months, we’ll highlight more findings especially relevant to **parenting for a digital future**. Watch this space!



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- From our notes
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